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Corps Advances Louisiana Coastal Restoration Plan

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works John Paul Woodley today reaffirmed Bush Administration support for restoration of Louisiana's coastal wetlands in announcing the Army Corps of Engineers draft Louisiana Coastal Restoration Plan. The Corps submitted the plan on July 2 to the Environmental Protection Agency for review and public comment under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Woodley said, "Coastal Louisiana is a resource of national significance. President Bush believes that we can make great progress on coastal wetlands restoration in a fiscally responsible way by using the best available science and sound management principles to achieve measurable results. I am pleased that the Corps and the State are developing a plan that meets these rigorous standards."

Woodley said that the proposed plan is expected to have an estimated 10-year price tag of up to \$2 billion dollars. These costs will be shared by the Federal and State governments.

The purpose of the plan is to accelerate implementation of potential restoration projects by identifying the highest priority, most promising coastal restoration activities. A further purpose of the plan is to guide the research and planning efforts that are needed to determine and support the future long-term needs of coastal Louisiana restoration.

The proposed plan is now available for further public comment and subject to Congressional authorization. It continues under development by the Corps, other Federal agencies and the State of Louisiana. A final report is scheduled for completion by the end of this year. The plan provides for accelerated implementation for up to five construction features as soon as feasibility information and engineering details are available. For some of these features construction could begin as early as 2006. The costs of these five features could be as much as \$786 million. Further, the plan provides for accelerated implementation of several additional elements, including a 10-year Science and Technology Program costing \$100 million, a Demonstration Program costing up to \$175 million, a Beneficial Use of Dredged Material Program costing \$100 million and a Modification of Existing Structures program that is expected to cost up to \$10 million. The combined accelerated authority would amount to about \$1.15 billion.

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In addition to the accelerated elements, the plan calls for Congressional authorization for \$60 million for a Large Scale Studies program and identifies another 10 projects subject to a case-by-case authorization by Congress as feasibility level investigations and other considerations are ready for evaluation. These additional projects identified for possible development within the plan could have additional costs of \$730 million.

Once formally adopted by Congress, the plan will guide how projects will be identified, prioritized, sequenced and budgeted over the next 10 years. Research and preparation of a plan have been underway for two years. The proposed plan incorporates its 10-year near-term approach into the previous documents under development by the State and the Corps of Engineers. "Under this approach, planning efforts will focus on the parts of the ecosystem that require the most immediate attention and will propose to address these needs through features that provide the highest return in net environmental and economic benefits per dollar cost," Woodley said.

Woodley commended Corps' determined and persistent leadership in developing a focused plan. Also he thanked Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco and her predecessor, Governor Mike Foster and members of the Louisiana Congressional delegation for "forging a cooperative alliance that has enabled the federal and state officials to come to agreement in this significant way."